Los Indios Matacos y su Lengua
[The Mataco Indians and their Language]

by
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with an introduction by
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Part I

Preliminary Introduction

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Before Mr. Juan Pelleschi published his interesting and painstaking book "Ocho Meses en el Gran Chaco" [Eight Months in the Gran Chaco] the language of the Matacos was practically unknown, although it was common knowledge that many tribes spoke it. It is hard to understand how this language could have disappeared so completely without leaving so much as a trace in the archives of the Jesuit Fathers; but the fact is that even at the beginning of the past century Father Machoni himself complained about the loss of grammars and vocabularies of the Tonocoté language, with which language I identify the Mataco-Mataguayo tongue [797] and which was the language used by the Jesuit missionaries to indoctrinate and evangelize these Indians.

In the early part of this century Hervás and Adelung, the former with his "Catálogo de las Lenguas" [Catalogue of Languages] the latter with his "Mithridates," were able to mention only the name of the language, as though to have on record that they were aware of its existence, but they lamented that they had been unable to secure a single fact in regard to it, not even a Pater Noster with which to illustrate their extremely sparse knowledge of this interesting group of languages spoken by countless Indians, (that is to say by Chaco Indians). The fact is that some time later the scholarly French traveler Alcides d'Orbigny, took

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Translator's Note: The Spanish word "cristiano" when used as a noun which literally means "Christian" has been translated throughout as "white man" or "white," since the translator feels that this is really closer to its basic meaning. "Non-Indian" might have been used instead but it seemed cumbersome and did not carry with it the tone of superiority which both "cristiano" in Spanish and "white" in English (however unfortunately) carry.

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175 at which the Bermejo river flows into the Paraguay, with the object of converting the numberless tribes which surrounded it. It was estimated that a hundred thousand Indians lived in the environs and Fathers Fonte and Angulo were their teachers. Almost all of the groups of Indians were Frontones, [Frente = Forehead--Translator], a name which was given to them because of their habit of shaving off the hair on the forward part of their heads.

These Indians hung clubs and handsful of arrows at their belts, and carried a staff or rod to which were attached many fish jaws, which looked like saws. They would go about naked, their bodies covered with paint to inspire terror. They were very jealous of their borders, and by way of warning they would hang the bodies of the enemies they had killed on trees. They were nomadic, and carried their camps from one place to another. [Latin parallel text omitted, see foreign text--Translator].

"Practically every group has a different tongue, and to such a degree does this variety reach that one can say that some eight languages are spoken on either side of the Bermejo river. And the greatest impediment in teaching these people is this variety of languages."

Many of these Indians must have belonged to those whom we call Matacos, yet not necessarily Frentones, since Techo says:- "Pooro gentem ferme hanc omnem ideo Frontones Hipani vocabant," which is the same as saying almost, but not all, were Frentones. That some must have been Matacos can be deduced from the end of Chapter 41: [Latin parallel text omitted, see foreign text--Translator] "But Barcena and Añasco, after leaving the territory of Tucuman, had reached the city of Concepcion, intending to establish themselves among the Matarães; and from there, as circumstances might permit, to go to the Frentones and try to win them over."

It is quite clear from this that the documents which Father Techo referred to made a clear distinction between Matarães and Frentones, since the former were Matacos and the latter Guaycurúes, i.e., Tobas, Mocovíes, Abipones, etc. [565]

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Description of the Matarães - Chapter 42. Year 1591.

For many reasons it is here advisable to reproduce the Latin text [Latin parallel text omitted, see foreign text--Translator]: "The

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175 Matará nation, compared to the other neighboring tribes, is very
797 docile. They used to live scattered about in small groups, as is the custom of the Barbarians, until Alonso Vera, founder and Adelantado of Concepción, made them live together in a town, and had most of them baptized. Evil having become rampant however, it happened that they were unfortunate enough to have as their first Ministers of the Sacrament priests who were absolutely worthless, to the point that they were completely ignorant of even the most elemental mysteries regarding Christian matters. After receiving baptism, not one of the neophytes had ever practiced holy confession. Among almost seven thousand inhabitants many were unbaptized, some being children and some adults. The facilities of the place however were in no way pleasant, humanly speaking—drinking water, muddy and stagnant, was collected when it rained in holes dug in the earth by hand. Corn and a type of pumpkin was their sole food. But that awfulness, both of men and of the place, the great suffering, and the attempting of difficult things for Christ, far from discouraging the members of the Company who took on the task, served only to gladden them. And they, distributing the tasks among themselves and using the Tonocoté language, brought about in a short time, that no one among that whole populace live in concubinage, having anything to do with the superstitions of their forebears or dare, on Sundays or other holy days to be absent from the sermon or from doctrinal classes. Most of them, by dint of frequent confession, were free from all guilt and penalty, disciplined themselves rigorously each week and with the utmost reverence toward the Body of Christ, communed. All were under the guidance of teachers who taught them both publicly and privately those religious exercises practiced by christians of long standing, for the edification of the people." [566]

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175 The mild Matáres put up with a great deal. And while the good
797 Fathers were evangelizing these docile catechumens, they were doubling their efforts in another direction, as Father Techo recounts in chapter 43 [Latin parallel text omitted--Translator]: "But that work was as nothing compared to the other undertaken by the Fathers when they exerted themselves in the learning of the several languages spoken by the Frentones. The Frentones being actually the reason for their coming, they must needs learn the language they used in order to be of any help to them. Thus it was that, in the course of a year and

SI7 Mataco SI 7
Chaco Indians SK4
Tonocote SI 13

M C 175 797 a half, Alonso Bárcena, an old man 65 years of age, on fire with zeal to win souls for Christ, sharing his studies with Pedro Agnasco, learned the Guarany, Natica, Quisoquina, Abipona, and Quiranguica languages, and put together vocabularies, grammars, doctrinal teachings and sermons, each for its respective use. Both of these men, before leaving Tucuman, had mastered and worked out a grammar and lexion of the Tonocoté, Kakana, Paquina and Quirandica languages, so that the Fathers who might be about to enter districts where these languages were spoken would have the way made easier. And in order that their usefulness be more widely disseminated Pedro Agnasco transcribed most of them many times, particularly the work which Alonso Bárcena had done, in a very neat hand, and, thus copied out, he gave them out for general use."

M C 114 We have here a series of very interesting facts, for not only do we learn to distinguish between one tongue and another, but we discover also the origin of that valuable Toba MS, which is at present in General Mitre's library, attributed to Father Bárcena, and which actually is very neatly written, and was not in the least bit troublesome when a transcription of it had to be made for the series on Argentine Languages. The two famous notebooks, although hardly full enough to learn Toba from, are invaluable, because they allow us to see the Toba spoken in 1592.

The chapter referred to ends with a well deserved eulogy of Fathers Bárcena and Agnasco. How many evil things can be accounted to the expulsion of the Fathers of the Company of Jesus! To that event we owe the many gaps in the chain of American languages [567]. The confusion and loss of documents was widespread, calamitous and even down to the present day we are lacking those grammars of the Kaka and Tonocoté languages which are of so much interest to history, ethnology and linguistics.

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M T 175 797 The Mission to the Frentones, time lost and other Matará matters.

Devoratis tot linguarum difficultatibus, says Father Techo in chapter 44. The missionaries began their efforts toward the Frentones via

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the Mogosnas and Naticas. "Verum (nevertheless), Deum immortalem, quo successu?" The Mogosnas had killed Francisco Vera de Aragon, the Frentones were in a state of great turmoil, and the Fathers had no other recourse but to return to their base mission among the Matarães. On that occasion no good was harvested from so much effort expended on learning the languages of the Frentones; but linguistics as a whole did gain something, and once again the Fathers of the Company gave evidence that for them martyrdom was glory.

In 1596 Gaspar Monroy and Juan Viana visited the Tonocotés and traversed the territory previously evangelized by Father Bárcena. (Techo, "Historia de la Provincia Jesuítica del Paraguay," L. II, cap. 8). [Techo, History of the Jesuit Province of Paraguay, Vol. II, Chap. 8].

In 1608 Father Diego Torres essayed to traverse these districts, and regarding this journey Father Techo recounts the following in Book III, Chapter 28 [Parallel Latin text omitted--Translator]. "The state of the Frentones was a sad one, for they wished nothing other than to continue in their perverse customs, dominated by the enemy of the human race. And on seeing them spread out in their forays to the very frontiers of Perú, and on becoming aware that the Abipones, Matacos, Naticas, Mogosnas, and Tonocotés, nations related to the Frentones, were bound in the same captivity because of lack of priests, he felt himself constrained, following the example of Saint Xavier, to return to Europe and, in the Universities of Spain and Italy, to try by dint of exhortation to awaken among the students a feeling of compassion toward such peoples." [568]

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This quote is an important one, for even if we cannot be sure that Father Techo used the [Latin] term "agnatas" in its true and restricted meaning—relatives on the father's side—he has nevertheless given us a piece of ethnic-linguistic information of great importance and which he doubtless had from some well-informed person. If the Tonocotes, Mataguas and Mataguayos are our present day Matacos it is clear that they must have had ethnic and linguistic affinities with the other nations of the Guaicurú type, as will later on be demonstrated.

The peaceableness of the Matarães contrasted with the extreme fierceness of the Frentones is remarkable. This difference must be attributed to atavism, and from it we sha[redacted]ble to derive something of interest, as will be seen later.

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175 page 164 and following is so to the point that I must needs quote it in its entirety.

"The Mataguayo tongue is spoken by a quite populous nation, the most villainous in the whole Chaco, located between 21° and 24° of latitude and 315° to 317° of longitude, bordering on the territory of the Chiriguanos. The Indians of said nation are known to the Spaniards by the name of Mataguayos, a name taken from the Mataguayo tribe which used to do their agricultural [584] labor for them and also be useful in trading. The other tribes of the Mataguayo nation were known later as time went on under the names of Agoyas, Tentes, Tainoas (or Tainuzes), Palomos, Ajotas, Tañis (it is conjectured that this last tribe belongs to another nation). These names are no longer used, their place having been taken by the following: Matacos, Hueshuos, Pesatupos, Abuchetas, Imacos, etc.

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[197] All the tribes speak the same language with some small differences, as reported by Abbot Joseph Araoz, resident in Faenza, who was a missionary to the Mataguayos and compiled a grammar and a vocabulary of their language some forty years ago. However, by reason of the great length of time elapsed and owing also to his very advanced years, he no longer remembers the language which he has not attempted to keep in mind as it was useless to him under the present circumstances in which blessed Providence has placed us. The aforementioned Mr. Araoz put forth a great deal of effort together with other missionaries
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[197] towards the conversion of the Mataguayos, of which 100 were added to the Chiriguano mission station called Rosario. No small number of Jesuits, both in the past century and in the present one have striven for the conversion of the Mataguayos, but with no other result than that of martyrdom, as is recounted in volumes IX, X and XXIV of Father Charlevoix's Historia del Paraguay [History of Paraguay].

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175 "The Lule tongue, simple in its construction and different from the other American tongues, (of which I have any knowledge or whose grammatical elements I have read) is spoken in two Jesuit mission stations in the Chaco. These places, which are called Miraflores and Valbuena, belong to the diocese of Tucumán and stand on the banks of the Salado River, near the 25th degree of latitude and between 313° and 314° of longitude. Valbuena lies east of Miraflores, about twelve
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175 leagues. Father Machoni, in his Lule grammar printed in 1732 (from
114 which I have extracted the grammatical compendium which I shall publish) gives a brief account of the nations that used to speak the Lule

000 of small stones contained in a hollow gourd which they hold in their hands and rattle to beat time."

764 "They bury their dead very close to the surface, being satisfied to dig a shallow pit into which they place the corpse half sitting up, with a few small branches beneath and on top of him and a little earth. Because of this it often comes about that jaguars, who can easily dig up these careless graves, get a taste for human flesh and become man-eaters. Sometimes the Indians put a little pot of water in the grave for the deceased's benefit. They also commonly burn a few things which he had used, and also his hut. The relatives of the deceased have to go to his burial place and lament over it, accompanying their cries with the pimpin. These wailings, according to the locality, are repeated for some days. They have also other [177] customs which they have picked up from the Tobas, to whom they are related and with whom they are friendly."

181 "It can be seen, then, that the Mataco tribe is at present a very 648 miserable one. Their way of living and their customs, furthermore, and the circumstances of our times together with the region in which they live do not point to a particularly happy future. It certainly cannot be said that the Matacos who live in Bolivian territory are declared enemies of the [607] whites or Christians, rather is it true that they sometimes work for them and say that they are friends of the whites and wish to be treated as such, in spite of the fact that this friendship seems feigned, a cloak under which they can the better steal and conceal themselves. They rustle the Christians' cattle which they exchange with the Tobas for horses, and these in turn they trade off to the Christians for other things they need, saying that they have captured these animals from their enemies."

181 "Across from the Mission of San Francisco de Pilcomayo and ● 777 on the banks of the river (the Pilcomayo River--Translator) are the ruins of the Mission of San Antonio, made up of Matacos brought together in 1863 and which, after having been in Bella Esperanza for two or three years were transferred to this place, where they stayed, in quite sizeable numbers, until 1879, in which year they escaped, although groups of them had fled and returned more than once before. While they remained at the Mission little or nothing could be accomplished with them in any way—they would not even consent to allowing their little children to be baptized when at the point of death. The

181 final pretext which they gave for escaping was that their white neighbours wanted to kill them, and it seems that this was actually the 197 case; and the Matacos had good reason to fear some reprisal for they continued to have an understanding with the Tobas in whose company they indulged in periodic stealing. They wished, or at least some of them did, to return a short while later, but the Missionary Fathers did not dare to readmit them as they could clearly see that at that time they could not hope to accomplish anything with such a depraved, shiftless and untrustworthy people, and also because they deemed it prudent to quell the slanderous murmurings of the whites who kept saying that the missionaries were informers for the Indians and aided them in their raids."

"And nevertheless it is a fact that the Tobas and also the Matacos stole a hundred times less when they were with the missionaries than before they came to them and after they left. I merely refer to these matters in order to point out the difficulties, which still exist, of converting and civilizing the Matacos; it may be that later on the circumstances will change, and the difficulties will disappear or lessen." [608]

XVIII

Observations on the Preceding Chapter

According to Father Cardús the Matacos are the Mataguayos Notenes [sic], Vejoses, Ocoles, Malbalaes, Chunupies, etc. One must not confuse these Chunupies with the Chulupies or Vilelas.

Here we see how the Noctenes can also be Notenes; and it would be interesting to find out what the dialect of the Malbalaes and Chunupies is like.

I have not thought it to be my business to abridge the reports of the Missionary Fathers because they are full of interesting facts and I am always wary of the personal element when the subject being treated is that of Indian nations around which there plays a certain discord among authors. Were I able to add anything, regarding these Indians, from personal observation, that would be another matter; but my field is limited to languages and I really needed trustworthy background material such as this in order to set the stage for what will later be said regarding the Mataco language and its co-dialects.

This state of affairs which is found among all the Chaco Indians is present also in the other savage nations of America, though admittedly, there are some -- in North America for instance -- among whom the existence of other invisible and good powers or beings have been recognized, called "manitos" and "oquis" by some.

Regarding this problem the Americans reason rather naively, though with a certain amount of wit: "why should one worry," they say, "about a being who is by nature good? Surely we need fear no evil from him because if he is good he will not wish to harm anyone." A metaphysician would say the same thing.

It must be confessed that all religions are a little weak regarding this (for want of a better term) original sin; for all preach or impose expiatory sacrifices to placate the supreme being's wrath.

Among those Chaco Indians who still preserve some hazy tradition rooted in the missionaries' teachings, a certain ceremony prevails, possibly the only one of a religious nature, which parodies a Christian rite. From time to time they gather around their old men and chiefs, the women on one side, the men on the other. In the center, on a pile of flowers they place an a'hót, a child who is to be a witch doctor. While at these meetings they talk, smoke and drink, and then go their separate ways saying that they have "been at mass." The witch doctors keep up a constant conversation with the God Child (1), and report

1. This function of "Child Witch Doctor" may be an Indian custom because something similar to it is to be found amongst the other Chaco Indians. (Ed.)

back to the people what he says.

In this ceremony as in all others the wizard or witch doctor always bends forward, covers himself, directs his speech downwards toward the ground (beneath the surface of which are the a'hóts). He first speaks in his normal tone of voice and then answers himself in penetrating, muffled tones which he varies to suit the nature of the particular a'hót, and the people think

2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 SI7 Mataco SI7

Chapter IX.

Social morality. Property. Law.

In the chapter on the social organisation of the Chaco tribes I had occasion to mention the social sympathy and feeling of solidarity which unites all members of the tribe, manifesting itself amongst other things in the widest hospitality. A few words may be added in this chapter to illustrate this characteristic feature of the social life of these Indians.

Mr. Barbrooke Grubb, who is probably the greatest living authority on the Chaco Indians, regards the »socialism» prevailing among these Indians as their greatest curse. According to him, it discourages competition in the way of one man striving to rise superior to his fellow-men and effectively impedes cultural progress in general. No Indian is encouraged to have more possessions than his neighbour, because, in obedience to the socialistic law, he would have to work for the support of others of whom he does not approve. Accordingly he produces no more than is absolutely necessary for current needs. He never saves anything for the day of adversity because others are not doing the same and therefore, if he had a store in reserve, the thriftless would step in and share it with him. It is owing to this system that the Chaco Indian has become the thriftless, lazy, and selfish fellow that he is. The chief endeavour of the Mission led by Mr. Grubb therefore was not only to impart to the Indians true Christian civilization in general, but particularly to destroy their old socialistic system with a view to making them self-reliant workers accumulating property by their own efforts.[1])

Mr. Grubb has naturally looked upon the conditions and moral character of the Indians with the eyes of a Christian missionary and may be quite right in his general contentions as to the best methods of civilizing a pagan

[1]) Grubb, *op. cit.* pp. 189 sqq.

[p. 92]

I had not planned to investigate. I hoped that the notes I took then would be useful for a more systematic and complete study of the Matako in the future. I should never have thought of publishing these tales and documents had I not good reason to believe that there is little chance for me to return to the Chaco.[1] Even if destiny should take me again to that country, I do not know whether the same material would be available. The disappearance of the old native cultures in South America is rapid, especially among tribes of a low cultural level.

The Matako, more than any other Chaco tribe, have been exposed to the degrading influence of white colonists, but there still remain some villages, especially on the upper Pilcomayo and on the middle course of the Bermejo, where the natives live according to ancient standards. Those who had their villages along the »linea«, the new railway between Formosa and Embarcación, were the most miserable wretches that I saw in South America. Generous English missionaries try with very precarious means to rescue the Indians by extending to them the protection of the Mission stations and by helping during the critical period of transition from their native culture toward a new form of life. The mission work among the Matako has proved most successful. The Indians have shown extraordinary aptitude and under the direction of the English missionaries they display remarkable talents in crafts that they ignored completely a few years ago. Their zest for instruction has always been deep and their enthusiasm must sometimes be moderated. The rapidity and ease with which the Matako adapt themselves to our modern civilization remains one of the most puzzling problems that I met with in South America. Seen in their native environment the Matako seem to be the most irreducible tribe of the Chaco. Even their physical aspect carries an impression of

[1] I was unable to check many of the ethnological data given in the notes. To make them scientifically available I have reproduced the information in the very terms of the Indians.

5: Folk E-5 (1962) 1963 SI7 Mataco SI7

582 583 836 [415] [482] the carrying-net, as much as possible. On the way home he will not assist her to place the *yica* in position. She must seat herself in order to place the band round her forehead and then rise unaided. They then proceed homewards. If the girl has been unable to adjust the yica or to carry it home in one stretch, the man will leave her the same afternoon. A strong and industrious man is not suited to a lazy wife, and vice versa.

581 584 It was definitely maintained that even a strong passion was not sufficient to keep a pair together. Even though the initial choice—made by the girl—was primarily based on affection, the second choice—in which both parties and their parents participate—is the decisive one, and this is based on a number of sensible considerations of an economic and social nature. Here it is particularly the girl's father who plays the decisive part, but as a rule he allows his view to be signified to the daughter through the mother. The girl can flout her parents' advice and marry as she likes, but this type of marriage is not regarded as durable. Normally she follows the advice, and there were times when a father requested a young man to abstain from visiting his daughter. The motives responsible for this appear primarily to be of an economic character. The girl's parents desire [591] an able fisher and hunter as their son-in-law for—with the prevalent matrilocality —they will be very dependent upon a son-in-law's ability to provide.

581 [577] [684] In earlier days bravery in war was considered to be an equally important factor, but this is no longer the case as the need for it has disappeared. On the other hand the girl's father considers it important that the son-in-law should possess a balanced temperament. Irascibility is deemed to be a great vice, in Mataco eyes perhaps the greatest, and, leads for example, in cases of infidelity straight to homicide and blood feuds between the families. In addition it was 582 considered a bad thing to marry into your own band. It was never explained as a ban or incest, but rather as a foolish disposition, because one lost the advantage of having another band, *wikyé*, to rely upon in case of controversial questions. This natural need for strength has caused the Mataco to prefer band-exogamy, and, for example, in the village Yuto on the Rio Pilcomayo, 81 out 88 controlled marriages were exogamous. This system is also considered advantageous by the young men, for even though they stood alone as a stranger in the daily life of their wife's family, they realised that both they and their children might stand in need of aid from another, powerful band. Much suggests that the Mataco 621 178 bands were formally more locally bound, so that a village consisted in principle of one or two bands plus foreign males-in-law, and one still often sees strangers, [584] young men and girls, come to a village dancing-place in order to seek a sweetheart. Nowadays, however, it is quite easy to find a suitable partner within one's own village because many different bands are now represented there. This mixing is particularly due to the general dispersal of local groups that took place during [797] the Chaco war of the thirties, and a later coming together under the care of the British evangelical mission in accordance with quite different principles. Formerly

6:Métraux E-5 (no date) 1943 SI7 Mataco SI7

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estos indios que están acosados por una situación económica de día en día más difícil y que fuera de las misiones están sometidos a múltiples vejámenes y humillaciones. No obstante no se han observado crisis de suicidio entre los demás indios del Chaco argentino que viven bajo condiciones igualmente desfavorables. Hay también indicios de que los casos de suicidio eran comunes al principio de la era de las misiones y esto puede hacernos suponer que el suicidio era la expresión tradicional de la agresión en contra de los miembros de su grupo contra los cuales el individuo no podía vengarse en otra forma. El ejemplo dado por un suicida se hace contagioso y de allí nacen epidemias esporádicas de envenenamiento.

762 The high rate of suicide among the Matako Indians of the Argentine Gran Chaco is a social phenomenon well worth our attention. In this tribe suicide at times assumes the character of an epidemic that causes havoc among the people and is a serious problem for the
[197] English missionaries who have several stations along the Bermejo and Pilcomayo Rivers. To these missionaries, especially to Dr. Collins
[115] Smith and J. White, I am indebted for most of my information on the suicidal mania that has flared up on several occasions during the past ten years. Personally, I have witnessed only one case. Information about suicide among the Matako who live in the bush or as miserable hilotes around the white settlements is not available, but there is little doubt that if the Matako in the missions are so prone to take their lives, those who find themselves exposed to hunger and mistreatment will be even more inclined to end their days wilfully.

Suicide among the Matako takes a strictly patternized form. In all cases known to me, the victims poisoned themselves by eating the
[824] fruits of the sachasandia (Capparis salicifolia Griseb). This fruit, the size of a walnut, grows on a tree which is very common in the Chaco region between the Bermejo and Pilcomayo Rivers. It ripens in December, the period which coincides with the largest number of
262 suicides. Strangely enough, the sachasandia is also an important food for the chaco Indians; it is collected in the summer, dried in
251 the sun and stored in caraguata bags to be consumed during the lean winter months. Even dried these fruits are extremely poisonous and
252 before eating them the Indians boil them six or seven times in different waters.

The clinical symptoms of sachasandia poisoning are: convulsions,
762 foaming at the mouth and, finally, coma. The heart beat becomes
164 jerky with short stops and upsurges of activity. The muscles of the throat are affected with paralysis and the patient makes a gurgling sound. When paralysis sets in, no emitic can be taken orally. The last phase of the agony is characterized by jumpy motions of the body

6:Métraux E-5 (no date) 1943 S17 Mataco S17

and jerky contractions. A strong diarrhea is also a concomittant effect of the poisoning.

Those who have been saved by prompt medical treatment (injection or morphine) describe their symptoms as follows: At first they feel considerably depressed, then they grow more and more dizzy "as if the world were going head over heels". The dizzines increases until the victim is forced to lie down.

It is apparent from the cases cited here that suicide among the Matako does not always take a collective form, but it may frequently do so. Death by suicide appears to be a temptation to which individuals yield with amazing facility and which is often contagious.

Case Histories

The very day I arrived at the Mission of San Andrés on the Upper Pilcomayo I was made aware of the frequency of suicide by poisoning. A young Indian in the mission suddenly took sick. (He was suffering from malaria.) At the first sign of his illness, his family rushed to the missionary to tell him the young man had eaten sachasandia and to ask for prompt help.

Later there was a real alarm when a young woman actually did attempt to kill herself. The woman had a lover who lived in another village with his wife and two children. The man's grandmother (Mother's mother) feared that he might desert his family and took steps to prevent such a disgrace. For this reason she called on the missionary and urged him to interfere. The missionary talked to the girl's parents and learned from them that the girl's lover often stayed at their home. A few days before the young woman had gone to her lover's village and had snatched a knife and other goods from his house. When she returned to her home, she demanded a compensation before she would break off relations with the man. Afterwards she suddenly left home and went to call on distant relatives in whose house she went to sleep. When these people wanted to send her back, they were unable to wake her. An old woman noticed a faint smell of sachasandia on her breath and immediately sent for the missionary. The limbs of the patient were already twitching, her mouth rigid. After an injection of morphine she began to vomit and so recovered.

Second Case. At another mission a 16 year old orphan committed suicide. The girl had had several love affairs but had formed no stable tie with a man. Finally she ate sachasandia and, since no one came to her assistance, died in the middle of the village. A woman took the dead orphan's head on her lap and her distant relatives wailed the whole day and night. Afterwards, however, the body was left

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naked on the plaza where the small children could throw stones at it and the hungry dogs could lick it. No one apparently wanted to touch the corpse and when the missionary ordered the Indians to bury it, they merely removed the remains to the bush but did not bother to dig a grave. The missionary attributed the people's indifference to the fact that the girl had no close relatives and that she was ill-tempered. According to the Indians, her bad disposition was also the cause of her unhappy love life.

Third case. A boy of 16 and his 14 year old wife often quarreled until, finally, the boy commited suicide. The girl at first appeared unconcerned but later joined in the death wailing. Soon afterwards she became depressed because some of the people held her responsible for her husband's death. Three days later she ate sachasandia fruit late in the afternoon expecting that the poison would take effect when she slept and when no one would detect her condition. She was discovered, however, and the missionary, who was called in great haste, was able to save her life. Although her parents reacted with concern, they seemed less disturbed than her parents in-law.

Fourth case. The cause for Teresa's attempted suicide was sexual frustration. This girl was about 13 years old and, since she had already menstruated, was considered to be an adult. She was extremely anxious to find a husband but all the young men were already married. Out of sheer desperation she set out for Espinillo, a village near her camp, hoping to attract the attention of the Argentine settlers there. Her relatives, however, prevented her from carrying out this project. As a result she became very despondent and finally ate sachasandia. When she felt the worst effects of the poison she became panic-stricken and went herself to the dispensary to get an emetic, which saved her life. Her widowed mother was deeply concerned and could not be persuaded that the girl would recover. During her daughter's illness, she often woke the girl from sleep, fearing that she might actually be dead.

Fifth case. Manuel, a boy of about 17, was married to an illtempered girl who at that time was pregnant by him. Tiring of her sharp tongue, he abandoned her and married another girl, Manuela. His first wife refused to resign herself to the new situation and continually quarreled with her former husband and his new wife. Her aggressiveness so depressed the couple that both decided to take poison to escape the vituperations of the incensed woman. In this case no one seemed particularly affected by the attempted suicide, perhaps because neither of the victims had living parents. It was a small child who warned the missionary in the middle of the night. The missionary

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forced the already uncounscious patients to swallow salt water and so to vomit the poison, but as soon as they came to themselves they struggled against the missionary in their will to die. Their resistance to care was overcome only with the help of several other persons. Both of them recovered but remained depressed for a long time afterwards.

Shortly after these events the deserted wife gave birth to a boy. She evinced no interest in the baby and wanted to kill him. The child's grandmother and other relatives, especially the women, opposed her intention and brought the baby to the missionary who tried without decided to resort to bribery and laid before the mother cloth and corn from the store, which he promised to give her if she suckled the baby. To this temptation the woman finally yielded. As soon as she had suckled the boy his life was safe, for a woman never kills an infant once she has nursed it.

Sixth case. Here the main character in the drama was Ipatsi, a 17 year old girl. She was an orphan whose sole relative in the village was a classificatory grandmother. She and her husband (25 years old) were incongenial and quarreled almost constantly. Then one day she poisoned herself. Her grandmother, who noticed the effects of the sachasandia late the same evening, sent a child to inform the missionary in charge. He arrived soon afterwards and found the girl conscious but very weak. She was crying hysterically. A few women who were standing nearby watched the scene in a detached way. Her husband sat on the edge of the bed, but seemed sulky and indifferent to her plight. Thanks to an emetic, she recovered. A few days later she departed from the her husband, despite the fact that she had given birth to a child.

Seventh case. Bertie, a boy of 14, ate sachasandia three times in one week and each time was saved by the missionary. He himself gave the following explanation for his attempted suicide. Teresa, whose case was described above, had cast her eyes upon him although he was distantly related to her. The boy's father encouraged her and insisted that Bertie marry her although he showed the greatest reluctance and insisted that he was still a child. Neither the girl nor his father would listen to him so that the boy had no peace and "could not sleep at night". At last he took poison. His plight aroused little sympathy except in his elder sister and, of course, in Teresa. The father died soon after the attempted suicide and so Bertie did not have to marry Teresa.

Eight case. The victim was a boy of 16 whose bright and cheerful disposition made him generally popular. He had joined the mission

avail to persuade the mother to receive her child. The missionary

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family suspected that she had taken the fruit although she showed none of the usual symptoms. One of her sons asked the missionary for help. As soon as she realized she had been discovered, she jumped up and vehemently denied having taken poison. The son insisted that she had and that she was trying to deceive her family and the missionary. To make sure that she was in no danger, the missionary decided to give her an emetic. The old woman struggled violently, throwing off everyone who approached her; only after an hour's strenuous fight was she overcome and forced to take the purge. Of course her stomach contained large quantities of the poison, which she had timed very carefully to take effect early in the morning when everyone would be deep in sleep and, therefore, unaware of her condition. Had it not been for her son's persistence, she undoubtedly would have been found dead the next day. Her husband, who was devoted to her, appeared to be quite unconcerned and, had the matter been left with him, would have done nothing to save her.

In general, love affairs are said to be the main cause of these suicides. They are particularly frequent on the occasions of the nightly dances which are closely connected with the sexual life of the Matako and at such times may take epidemic proportions. A young man will take poison for some reason and soon after others follow suit. Asked why they try to kill themselves, they explain that they feel compelled to do so by some superior force. The fruit attracts them; the desire to eat it becomes an obsession. When they walk in the bush their attention becomes riveted upon the fruit, which they see everywhere, until the temptation becomes too strong and they eat it.

Young boys at school are quite likely to take poison when they have been scolded by their teacher. For this reason the missionaries must exercise particular care to avoid offense when the poisonous fruit is ripe and, consequently, especially dangerous.

Actually there is a great deal of ostentation in these suicides. It is likely that many who take poison, do not take a fatal dose. Those who really wish to die generally take the poison secretly and try to conceal the fact until it is too late to help them. The others, on the contrary, boast about what they have done and are willing, even eager to get medical treatment.

This mania also has its simulators and fakers. Certain individuals imitate all the clinical symptoms, —convulsions, foaming, etc.— without having tasted the deadly fruit. Here again the desire to show off, to be the center of attention is foremost. Every suicide attempt provokes turmoil in the village and everyone flocks to the house where

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762 the victim awaits death. It is said that some men take poison to blackmail a woman into complying with their wishes.

It has been noticed time and again that only young people eat sachasandia as a rule. Among the cases cited above there is only one of an elderly woman who attempted to take her life. In this connection, the question arises of whether suicides are more common among women than among men. No data on this point have been gathered, but it is the impression of the missionaries that suicide is equally common among men and women with perhaps a slight majority among women. The first problem raised by the frequency of these suicides is whether the suicides are caused by new conditions of life —by culture clash and lack, of adjustment to a new world— or whether they were equally frequent formerly when the native culture still functioned? Since no Matako group now lives in its earlier surroundings, the truth of the matter will be difficult to learn. If the problem is presented to the missionaries who are largely responsible for the disappearance of the Indian culture, they always insist that suicides were one of the worst manifestations of the culture before the Indians were saved. They point out, moreover, that the number of suicides was particularly high at the time when the missionaries began their work in the region, and they establish a close relation between suicide and dancing. One of the missionaries wrote to me: "In the old days when the Indians were still dancing, there used to be as many as a dozen attempted suicides in one day, resulting in my being up most of the night going from one to another. They were so many and so frequent, however, and it happened so long ago that I can remember none in detail". This evidence is confirmed by other missionaries who recall that the worst epidemics always occured in connection with the night dances which have a decidedly sexual character. At such times young married men who took part in the entertainments slept with girls, thus arousing the jealousy of their wives and the anger of their mothers-in law. If as a result one or two people committed suicide, others would follow their example.

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The link established between night dances and suicide was the main reason for the strict tabu against dancing which is now enforced in every mission. Indians have been made so aware of the evil of dancing that even little girls have been kept from their normal and charming jumping about. Missionaries, however, are not responsible for this measure; it has been self-imposed by the Indians.

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No cases of suicide are known among other tribes who live in the same region and under similar conditions. At any rate, I have never

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been told about a Toba or a Pilaga who killed himself. Apparently, suicide is a culture trait restricted to the Matako.

Can this pathological condition be attributed to the life in the mission and to the discipline imposed upon the natives who have shown willingness to become Christians? The psychological motivation for conversion is undoubtedly fear of the white men and hunger. The missions are a buffer between the Indians and the ruthless white colonists. In the missions the Indians find jobs and, in case of distress, food. They also receive free medical treatment. The price they must pay for these privileges is to give up dancing and drinking, to abandon warfare and native sports and to forget shamanism. In addition they are expected to go to church twice daily and the children and many adults spend part of the day in school. Life under such conditions is extremely dull. All the activities that made life worth while disappear unless they can secretly play hockey or indulge in a drinking bout. This, of course, they quite frequently do. Although their present situation can explain their indifference, their anxieties and their lack of attachment to life, can the mission discipline be held responsible for the Metako suicidal mania?

In six of the cases cited above, marital maladjustment was blamed for the suicide attempt. In one case, the suicide was attributed to lack of sexual gratification. One couple attempted suicide because of the insults showered upon them by an angry and frustrated woman. One case may be ascribed both to sexual maladjustment and fear (the case of Martin). Criticism by neighbors is the cause in one instance. In only one case that of the old woman who had lost her son, can grief be considered the determining reason for the suicide.

In addition, there is no doubt that suicide among these people has a decidedly aggressive character. The Matako use suicide as a threat; by killing themselves, they punish the person who has offended them. The punitive character of suicide leads to the problem of aggression and aggressiveness among these people. In daily life little direct aggression is shown in their mutual relations. There are almost no quarrels; ordinarily men are not harsh to the women. Children are coddled and are seldom scolded. Nevertheless, strong aggresive tendencies exist. Whoever has witnessed a hockey party on the Pilcomayo loses any illusion he may have had about the gentleness and softness of Matako manners. In its brutality and fierceness each hockey party resembles a pitched battle. The Indians paint themselves and dress as if they were getting ready to face a real enemy. The teams are formed by men who are related by blood or who live in the same community. The adversaries are frequently members of bands which are on unfriendly

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terms. Every party ends with broken limbs, smashed skulls or at least ~~avail to persuade the mother to receive her child. The missionary~~ with black and blue marks. The fact that they gamble for high stakes on the outcome contributes to the violence of the party and to the passionate ardor of the players.

Aggressiveness finds another outlet in drinking bouts. Fights are so intimately associated with these alcoholic enjoyments that, before a party begins, the chief gives a long talk in which he exhorts the men to refrain from violence and to have a good time in peace and harmony. When the men begin to get inebriated the women conceal the weapons in the bush. Despite these precautions, quarrels and fights are rather common. Men remember slights and insults delivered months before and belatedly challenge the offender. Threats are exchanged and hard words are followed by acts of violence.

Formerly, of course, suppressed bad feelings found an outlet in the practice of black magic and aggressive personalities were able to indulge in regular warfare and scalping parties.

In order to maintain discipline and to prevent violence, missionaries have prohibited hockey, drinking and, of course, witchcraft and warfare. As a result there is in modern Matako society no institutionalized means for any person to give vent to his feelings of anger and aggression. Suicide is the only way open to punish the offender.

It is possible that interest in life itself decreases as the Indian is progressively prevented from carrying on any of his former activities. In addition, he is faced with increasingly difficult economic problems. The struggle for life is harsher and the conditions more humiliating. The Indians are well aware that they are the underdogs.

In a general way, we may say that the Matako have no resilience. They are abused, down trodden by the whites but rarely revolt. They accept their lot with abject resignation. Why should they bother, is their attitude; since the white man has come it has always been the same. Missionaries say that they rarely resist temptation; a man who for years has been a good Christian, "sins" at the first opportunity. Moreover, the Matako are decidedly unaquisitive; they give away for trifles the very objects for which they have worked for months in the sugar cane factories. They do not even bother to increase their small herds. Such indifference to possessions increases with old age. An old man asked, "Why should I bother to get more goats, since I am about to die? This behavior undoubtedly carries over from the past when the property of the dead was destroyed.

Nevertheless, since similar conditions prevail among other Indian groups without provoking a comparable predilection for suicide, the

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Matacos or Noctenes

M 131 648 This tribe is also very numerous; it lives on the right bank of the Pilcomayo River, occupying the part opposite the zone occupied by the Toba, with whom they maintain friendly relations which are disturbed from time to time, especially at the time when the algarrobas and other fruits ripen.

M 797 179 A group of these Indians in times past formed a part of the San Antonio del Pilcomayo Mission, where today the Chaco Delegation is located, occupying the mission buildings. But because they are as fickle, or perhaps more so, than the Toba, Religion and the State could make little progress with such Indians.

M 131 197 648 T 186 These Indians are very numerous and in small groups extend as far as the shores of the Bermejo; their language is totally different from that of the other tribes and they hardly mix, although they maintain friendly relations with the Toba, to whom they are considered to be inferior.

M 181 578 273 Their physiognomy is overly languid; sadness can be read in their faces, and they are very miserable; nevertheless they are ferocious in war, in jealousy, or in a state of drunkenness; they injure and kill one another. Out of these considerations the women refrain from drinking to the state of inebriation in order to prevent their husbands' disorders and to hide the weapons in the event of the outbreaks which frequently occur (1).

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1. In the drinking bouts they are the same as the Toba; they make a mead from the fruits of the algarroba, which is almost as intoxicating as brandy; they also make mead from other wild fruits; they do not make <u>chicha</u> because they hardly plant maize.

M 181 721 648 They are more peaceful Indians than the Toba, are not very warlike, and do not attack the houses of the whites but profit when they can from the latter's cattle, especially should a famine break out due to a lack of wild fruits.